

VZCZCXRO5108
PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHDM #5448/01 3620645
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 280645Z DEC 06
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2702
INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0210

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DAMASCUS 005448

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

NEA/ELA
NSC FOR MARCHESE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/21/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: SENATORS DODD AND KERRY DISCUSS REGIONAL ISSUES
WITH FM MU'ALLIM

Classified By: CDA William Roebuck for reasons 1.4 b/d

11. (C) Summary. Senators Kerry and Dodd told FM Walid Mu'allim that the time was ripe for strong unilateral action by the SARG if it truly wanted to be part of the solution for regional crisis in Lebanon, Iraq, and among the Palestinians. Mu'allim commented that the SARG would pursue security and economic cooperation with Iraq, as well support Iraq's political process because it was in Syria,s national interest to do so. Mu'allim asked that the U.S. work to bring Hamas into the peace process instead of pushing it away. On Lebanon, Mu'allim affirmed that the SARG would support work towards a compromise to the current crisis but that the SARG would continue to guard its prerogatives there jealously. End Summary.

12. (C) On December 21, Senator Christopher Dodd and Senator John Kerry met with Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Mu'allim, following the Senators, much longer meeting with President Asad (septel). The Senators' 50-minute conversation with Mu'allim focused primarily on Iraq, although both Lebanon and the Palestinian) Israeli conflict were also discussed. Mu'allim was warm, welcoming, and obviously desirous of establishing a rapport with his guests. Mu'allim listed Syria,s foreign policy priorities as: concluding a peace agreement with Israel that returns the Golan completely to Syria; stability) implying both internal and regional stability; and economic prosperity. Mu'allim claimed that Syria,s objectives were not opposed to U.S. goals in the region. He also insisted, however, that the U.S. Administration believed pressure and isolation worked with the SARG, while in reality it only freed the hand of the most hard-line elements within the regime.

Iraq

13. (C) Mu'allim commented that his recent trip to Iraq (November 19-21) succeeded in initiating security cooperation. A joint security agreement was subsequently signed during the visit to Damascus of Iraq's Interior Minister, which Mu'allim said would now be implemented. The Syrian FM commented that economic cooperation would begin in earnest in the coming weeks. Mu'allim said opening an embassy in Iraq was important since it would put Syria in a position to support the Iraqi political process and allow it to act as a counter weight to Iran's 100-diplomat embassy there. He commented that the SARG supports the "one million" Iraqi Baathists, viewing them as fellow secular, Pan-Arabists and that it regards the successful integration of the Baathists into the political process as critical to any negotiated solution to stop the escalating violence.

¶4. (C) Mu'allim said that the SARG has had a long dialogue with the Iranians on Iraq. In the beginning, the Iranians were intent on dismantling Iraq and still would like to keep the country weak, according to Mu'allim. He admitted to being somewhat "nervous" about Iran's goals in Iraq, but commented that Iran could play a very important role in stabilizing the situation in Iraq if Iran's security concerns could be satisfactorily answered. As an example, Mu'allim said Abdel Aziz Hakim has strong relations with Iran and the largest militia, which he cannot finance on his own. Moqtada Al-Sadr on the other hand, has no relations with Iran, according to Mu'allim. (Note: People linked to the Asad regime have told us privately that the SARG's influence with Sadr is one of the ways the Syrian regime could help in Iraq. How much of this is posturing is uncertain, but we do know Sadr has a liaison office in Damascus and came to the Syrian capital for an extended visit earlier this year. End note.)

¶5. (C) Mu'allim said the USG must make a public commitment to withdraw from Iraq for the situation there to improve. The timetable was not important--five even ten years--and should be decided between the USG and the GOI, commented Mu'allim. A public commitment to withdrawal would deprive the insurgency of its key rallying cry--combating the "occupation"--and allow the moderate Islamists to enter the political process, according to Mu'allim. As it is, Mu'allim said, al-Qaida's presence in Iraq has spread and is more dangerous now than ever before.

Lebanon

¶6. (C) Turning to Lebanon, Mu'allim commented that if the U.S. wants stability in Lebanon it must not destabilize

DAMASCUS 00005448 002 OF 002

Syria. Mu'allim said the essential issue in Lebanon is the Hariri tribunal and whether the process would be political or criminal, commenting that the SARG believes there are those that want to use the tribunal as a tool against Syria. Mu'allim asserted that the SARG would be willing to help with stability--he had personally assured Amr Moussa that the SARG would support the Arab League's effort to find a compromise to the current crisis, adding that Syria would not "interfere." He commented that Syria was happy its troops were out of Lebanon, and the regime would be unwilling to return military forces to the country.

Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

¶7. (C) Mu'allim denied media reports that Syria had deployed troops and missiles along its border with Israel, but commented that the SARG takes very seriously the potential for direct conflict with Israel. Mu'allim said that any time there is a weak government in Israel, as he judged Olmert's government to be, the chances of war increased as a result of Israeli insecurities that sometimes provoked rash military initiatives. Mu'allim advised against &cornering8 the Hamas leadership, instead urging that co-opting Hamas holds much more promise. Mu'allim commented that Hamas had already made significant progress in moderating its stance since taking political power: agreeing to a cease fire, demonstrating willingness to pursue a national unity government, and publicizing Khalid Misha'al's statement recognizing the '67 borders, thus implicitly accepting Israel's right to exist. For its part, Mu'allim said, the SARG had worked with Qatar for the last two months to try to encourage the formation of a Palestinian national unity government and had pushed Hamas to make concessions in that regard. Mu'allim added that he had called Khalid Misha'al himself from Moscow on December 18 to warn against allowing any further street violence.

¶8. (U) The CODEL cleared this cable.
ROEBUCK